

A Friend In Need

by Vaneria Potter

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Summary: Being the odd one out is never fun, but it is easier when you have someone to share it with. What if Hiccup wasn't the only one to have secretly befriended a dragon?

1. Chapter 1

Disclaimer: I don't own How To Tame Your Dragon, and am making no money off of this. All credit to Cressida Cowell and Dreamworks.

Summary: Misery loves company, and nowhere has only one misfit. It's a lot easier to be an outcast when there's someone with you. What would it have been like, if Hiccup had a friend before Toothless?_

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><p>CHAPTER ONE

It is never nice to be the misfit, the outcast, and the generally-considered-useless, but it is much easier when you have company.

At least, that was Natalya Oakenhawk personal opinion, which she reminded herself of on a several-times-daily basis. It wasn't easy being the second-worst Viking on Berk, if not the entire Barbaric Archipelago, especially when you only held that place because keen intelligence was not highly thought of on Berk, and Natalya could steer a ship, even if she disliked sea-based activities of any kind, and could lift an axe or sword without staggering.

Then again, it could also be because Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third was the Chief's son, and people therefore paid a lot more attention when he messed up.

Of course, Natalya's heritage didn't do her any favours, either. No

one would ever say it to Natalya's face, or if there was even a slight possibility that her mother, Enna, was within hearing range, but it was no secret that everyone thought that it was Natalya Bog-Burglar heritage that made her so strange. A Viking as big and strong as Bjorn had been, content to be a scholar of early Icelandic poetry? Besides, Bog-Burglar Vikings were always women, but Natalya was only marginally better than Hiccup in a fight, and refused to fight dirty. Naturally something had to be wrong there.

It was only natural that Hiccup and Natalya gravitated toward each other as the years passed. Natalya was lonely, and her interactions with the other young Vikings usually consisted of being bullied when the adults weren't looking. As just punching Snotlout or Dogsbreath was out of the question, it was a very good thing that Snotlout rarely managed to work his way through some of the insulting gems Natalya picked up from her father's studies.

Hiccup was in the same situation, though he preferred sarcasm, which almost always flew over everyone's head. He was considered doubly strange, as he was the son of the chief, and both of his parents had been among the best Vikings in the history of Berk.

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><p>Being told to go away while the adults were discussing important things was annoying, especially when her three-years-younger cousin, only seven, was allowed to stay and participate. Then again, Little Miss Precocious Astrid always wanted to be included, and Natalya supposed that letting Astrid stay and be ignored was easier than suffering through a tantrum over being excluded.</p>

Sulking, Natalya decided that a wander was a better use of her time than sitting in a corner. Maybe Aunt Agatha, her guardian since her parents' death the past winter, would actually notice her absence this time. Or maybe not; she was probably used to people disappearing for extended periods of time.

Grabbing the Dragon Manuel and the notebook she was using to make her own copy, she set off into the woods.

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><p>It is easy for a ten-year-old to get lost without directions, but Natalya could make her way back from a new destination, if she had a few landmarks. If she didn't have landmarksâ€¦ well, Freya had received more than a few prayers along the lines of having someone find her before the night got too cold.</p>

Today, she chose not to press her luck and made her way to the rock formations off of the south coast of Berk. It was easy to reach at low tide, if you didn't mind a bit of climbing, and it was a good place to be alone, as there was nothing to smash and not enough room to train, so the only Vikings who went near there were the younger show-off s who tried to use the area as an obstacle course for their boats.

Sitting down on a flat rock, Natalya spread the Dragon Manuel in front of her, pages weighed down with a few pebbles, holding her notebook on her lap.

_Common-or-Garden: As the name suggests, this is the most common breed of dragon. Coloured Green, Yellow or Brown, they are armed with basic teeth and claws, and prickly spines. Their speed is most noticeable when this dragon is in retreat.

>Gronckles: the plug-ugly of the dragon species. Gronckles are very thick-skinned, with strong jaws and hard skull for ramming its enemies. Lazy, to the point of often falling asleep in mid-flightâ€|

Closing the two books and reminding to return the Manuel to Fishlegs, so that _he _could be the one to get in trouble with Gobber if it wasn't returned in time, Natalya leaned back to enjoy the rare lack of cloud-covered sunshine.

Loud squawking made her eyes snap open, reaching for a rock to throw at whatever hapless seagull had dared to interrupt her. It was a good thing that she opened her eyes first, because the commotion turned out to be aerial open warfare between a flock of seagulls and several terrible terrors.

Natalya hastily dropped the stone she had picked up. Terrible Terrors were only the size of a large cat, but a flock of them could carry off a small fishing boat. Even a few were more than capable of carrying off a small human child. Maybe they would just finish fighting with the seagulls over the fish and ignore her...

...Loki had it out for her, Natalya was sure of it.

Not only did the winged combatants spot her, the Terrors took the opportunity to dive-bomb the seagulls, causing them to drop the fish. Natalya barely managed to move the Dragon Manuel (she would be in all kinds of trouble if she brought it back smelling of salmon) before a large cod dropped in her lap.

It was almost funny to see a pair of Terrors swoop down after the fish, spot Natalya, and crash into each other while attempting to pull out of the dive.

As the two picked themselves up, growling at each other, a third approached far more slowly, looking at her with wide, imploring eyes. It seemed that size was not the only thing that Terrible Terrors had in common with cats, as Natalya carefully held out one of the fish, barely holding back a loud 'Awww!'

The Terrible Terror carefully snatched the fish and gulped it down. Natalya watched in cautious fascination, then tried not to shriek and bolt as it snuggled up to her side. Slowly and very carefully, she petted the vivid-yellow reptile, as she would a kitten, a likeness that increased when the Terror let out a rumbling purr.

Natalya was still too small to haul in a proper catch, but she still had her parent's small fishing boat and nets, which she tended faithfully, as Aunt Agatha wasn't much of a cooker, and purchased bread got very old very quickly. Trading a few fish for some smoked meat or other food made life much easier.

Now, she brought the Terrors down to her fishing spot, where a good catch was waiting for her. Deciding that the catch was large enough to spare some, Natalya separated the catch into several large baskets for easier transportation, and offered two of them to the Terrors.

Two Terrors grabbed the baskets, while the other four grabbed Natalya, taking off in a shot.

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><p>Berk had a small, hidden valley, probably uncharted by the virtue of being impossible to reach without the ability to fly, thanks to the twenty meter sheer drop between it and the almost impossible mountain on the other side. Natalya found it when the flock of Terrible Terrors decided to take her home for the day.</p>

Unfortunately, while Terrible Terrors could easily carry something, if there were enough of them, they found a gentle landing to be somewhat more difficult. Luckily, Natalya had enough practice with falling to land on her feet, and nearly fell over again when she stood up and looked around.

The valley was beautiful, scattered with all kinds of dragons, from glow-worms to Wind-walkers to Monstrous Nightmares. A few of them looked up at her loud gasp, but quickly went back to chasing rabbits or sunbathing or whatever else they had been doing, as Natalya struggled to get her head around this new discovery.

It was an incredible feeling, almost beyond description, as though she had finally found something that she never knew she had been searching for, her entire life. Natalya's first thought was to run and tell Hiccup, but she stopped short. Hiccup wanted nothing more than to fit in with the other Vikings, even if it meant getting maimed while killing dragons. Best/only friend or not, she couldn't tell him about this.

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><p>Fish were a lot less tasty after being spilled all over the ground thanks to a rough landing, so after a few days of Natalya bringing in fish, several of the larger dragons had taken over from the Terrible Terrors in ferrying the fish that Natalya managed to catch. She still had to rely of the Terrors to get her into the valley, though, which never made for a pleasant trip.</p>

Still, it was a small price to pay for spending a peaceful afternoon among the dragons. As the sun descended toward the horizon, and the Dragons started to settle for the night, Natalya stood and stretched, bracing herself for another rough flight. She started when a Stealth Dragon (judging by the flattened grass and very faint outline) scattered the flock and knelt before her.

Slowly, carefully, Natalya climbed onto the Stealth-Dragon's back. The dragon spread her wings, raised the side flaps to hide Natalya from outside view, and took off.

It was indescribable. The wind rushed past them, whipping at her hair and clothes as they soared and dove through the air. Natalya couldn't stop herself from laughing with joy. After a lifetime of searching, she had finally found a place to belong; here, flying through the skies on dragonback, was where she was meant to be.

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><p>AN: Right, first chapter up. Natalya won't be a Mary-Sue, but the story will be mostly from her Point Of View. One Person will be heralded with the discovery of something, but that doesn't mean other people haven't tried or looked into it before that. People who invented Hot Air Balloons or other forms of transportation, or even bows and various firearms, must have had to take gravity, motion and reaction into account (hot air rises, guns and cannons recoil, etc). Isaac Newton just took it further and wrote the Law of Gravity._

On that note, did anyone else who read the books have the initial reaction that they should have changed the names and used it as a prelude to the books, with the Movie Hiccup being Hiccup III's ancestor, who was responsible for originally taming the dragons? Just a thought.

2. Chapter 2

Disclaimer: I don't own How To Train Your Dragon, and no profit is being made. All praise should go to Cressida Cowell and Dreamworks.

Summary: See Previous Chapters

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><p>CHAPTER TWO

It was a known fact that Natalya tended to disappear most afternoons, when she finished her chores, along with a portion of the days catch. No one really complained, based on the vague hints that she might possibly be trying to feed something. Natalya meant that she was sneaking off to feed the dragons, but the other Vikings took it to mean that she was attempting to improve her admittedly abysmal cooking skills, without burning down the kitchen faster than any dragon raid.

She had, at first, but quickly figured out that anything more complex than bread, porridge, boiled eggs or pie cooked in the stone oven pots instead of in pastry was going to be an unmitigated disaster. In short, if it took more than five steps in cooking instructions, it was going to end badly.

The real reason was to build trust between her and the dragons she had run into. There is one lesson that all animals learn very quickly: Where The Food Is.

Somehow, despite the dragon raids, the adult dragons were not bringing in enough food for all of the hatchlings, so a free food source was treated with less suspicion and/or hostility than it normally would be.

Once it became clear that Natalya was there to stay, something changed, though it still took several weeks for Natalya to figure out what else was wrong. Adult dragons might drop off food when they could, but most of the time they simply left their offspring as soon as it was old enough to flyâ€| and didn't return for them

Without any means of clear communication, Natalya never really got a clear answer, but she did receive the impression that the Dragon Island was not nearly the sanctuary that the adult Vikings supposed it to be. There was something else there, something that the adult dragons wanted their young as far away from as possible.

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><p>Natalya wasn't entirely sure that she wanted to know how a Sky Dragon/Stealth Dragon crossbreed came into existence, but quite frankly, didn't care. Combining a Stealth Dragon's camouflage abilities with a Sky Dragon's natural appearance, the dragon she had named Skyfire was sky-blue, with wings shading to grey, and could disguise herself as a storm cloud, (a disguise re-enforced by the Stealth Dragon ability of finger-lightning) but could not turn completely invisible. She also lacked the projectile fire-rockets, explosive burn streams and military correctness characteristic of Stealth Dragons, though some would consider that a good thing.

Skyfire was also significantly smaller than Sky Dragons (about twice the size of the horses ridden by the nomads in the Ural mountains, where Natalya's father had grown up) but had its need for solar energy, and could regularly be found sunbathing on a mountain ridge in the early afternoon. Since Skyfire would be outside the valley anyway, she was quickly designated to be Natalya's mode of transport over the chasm.

That soon progressed to flying for pleasure and to teach the assorted babies, from there into quiet companionship based on the need to just sit quietly without disturbances once in a while, and finally into a friendship closer than any Natalya had shared before. Skyfire was also very demonstrative, and would often curl protectively around Natalya as they sat together, nuzzling her as if for reassurance. Natalya quickly learned to keep her hair in a tightly-braided crown, if she didn't want to return home looking like she had a bush on her head.

* * *

><p>Natalya could ride a dragon, but it was very unlikely that she would ever fight one, even in the even more unlikely case that she wanted to. The problem was, EVERY young Viking went into Dragon Training, even the Ultra-Nerd Fishlegsâ€| unless they already had something else to do.</p>

Come to think of it, that was probably why Stoik had gone out of his way to apprentice Hiccup to Gobber. All the time at the forge might give Hiccup too much time to work on his inventions, but it also kept him too busy to train with the others, much to everyone's relief. So what could Natalya do?

With so many Vikings training to fight and kill dragons, there was a

distinct lack of bread-making or small-home-repair Vikings. Stone-masons and carpenters were in abundance, thanks to dragons constantly burning the houses down, but aside from the basics that all Vikings knew, bakers and such were in short supply.

Natalya might be useless with the more complex foods, but she was improving, and the few things she could make usually turned out quite tasty.

Her parents had been sensible enough to build their house entirely out of stone, up to a slate roof, which was expensive, but at least didn't need to be totally re-built every time a dragon came to visit. Therefore, it was still in reasonably good condition, and could easily be re-designed into a shop if she enlarged the kitchen and had a wall built between the living area and the large front room.

She could make bread and pie, and what she didn't have, she could buy or trade for. The best hunter in the village was fairly young, unmarried, and even worse at cooking than Natalya was. A sweet smile and the offer of a trade, baked goods for a portion of whatever he brought back, would get her enough meat to use in pies, eat, and maybe even have some left over for the dragon flock.

She could get the Terrible Terrors to show her some good fishing spots, and put out nets, which only needed to be checked in the morning and evening. Come to think of it, Terrors were used to working in groups, so if Natalya taught them to use nets the same way that gulls caught fish, they could bring food in for themselves. Natalya didn't object to bringing them food, but it took a dangerous amount of time, risk and effort to feed everyone, and she could tell that being forced to rely on a human grated on the older dragons.

* * *

><p>Things were becoming very difficult, and while Hiccup still had his heart set on becoming a Viking, if you heard something enough times, (namely, that you were generally useless and it would probably never happen) you tended to start to believe it. That was Natalya's chance. Hiccup's single-minded determination to prove himself could be a very bad thing for the dragons when he eventually became chief, so Natalya needed to take the risk of at least 'speculating' that there could be other options.</p>

Hiccup had gone in the woods, as he often did after a lecture or argument with Gobber or Stoik, to find somewhere quiet to think. Depending on the severity of the incident, Natalya sometimes followed him, in case he wanted to talk about it. This was one of the times that he probably didn't, but was also probably her only chance to talk about the dragons. "How bad was it?"

Hiccup looked unhappy. "Worse than usual. My invention backfired, and a Nightmare got away. Dad wasn't happy, and said that we'd never manage to keep dragons captive, the way I kept accidentally setting them free."

Natalya winced in sympathy and leaned back, tilting her head up into the rare sunshine. "Do you ever think that maybe there might be another way? Like, we could find out why the dragons raid us so often. In other parts of the world, dragon raids come about once or twice a year, rather than a few times a month, and most solve the

problem by setting aside a small herd or regular supply of food to convince the dragons to leave without attacking them."

Hiccup gave an unhappy chuckle. "Interesting thought, but it'd never work. Dad wouldn't believe it, or would call those other places 'soft', and even if he did believe you, he'd never go for it."

An unfortunate truth, but nothing worthwhile came easy. "Chief Stoik might not, but you're going to be chief one day, and you could make changes. Come on, I want to show you something."

She wouldn't show him the dragon sanctuary, but Skyfire kept a distant eye on Natalya whenever she ventured out of sight of the village, in her guise as a cloud. It didn't take long to find somewhere open enough to signal the dragon, though Hiccup looked ready to collapse with shock when Natalya stepped forward and wrapped her arms around Skyfire, and the dragon not only didn't attack, but gave a rumbling purr and nuzzled her. "But â€“ you â€“ what?"

Natalya very carefully didn't smirk. "This is Skyfire. I met her a few years ago, and she hasn't harmed me once. Aside from you, she's my best friend, and we go flying sometimes. You see, we don't have to kill each other."

Hiccup felt as though his brain had shut down. Natalya had always been a bit odd, not that he was one to talk, but consorting with dragons? Claiming one as a friend? When had Loki decided to turn the world upside down and into a huge cosmic joke?

Knowing that it would take a while to grasp, Natalya busied herself stroking Skyfire, leaning against the blue dragon. Actions spoke louder than words, right now, and seeing a human and a dragon so close to each other, without fear or attacking, might do more to convince him than any amount of talking. Finally, Hiccup snapped out of it, standing up and re-focusing on the quiet and relatively sane girl who turned out to be the craziest of them all.

Hiccup stood as tall as he could, and for a moment, Natalya could see the chief he would one day become. "I'm glad that there is another way, but until we find a way to stop the raids, or know what causes them, there's nothing I can do. I won't tell your secret, but for now, I can't help you, either."

Natalya nodded solemnly. It wasn't agreement, or a promise that things would change, but it was a step in the right direction. She would wait, and be patient, and perhaps the Norns would provide another opportunity.

Sensing that the conversation was over, Skyfire knelt down, and Natalya swung herself onto her back as the side-flaps lifted, taking on the appearance of a cloud. "Come on, Skyfire, I feel the winds calling our name."

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><p>AN: A bit choppy, but since this chapter is more a series of events than anything, I hope it doesn't turn out too badly._

>Constructive Criticism is very much appreciated. Flames are not. I don't mind if you are brutally honest - I prefer it, actually - but try to be polite about it.

Thanks, Nat

3. Chapter 3

Disclaimer: I do not own How To Train Your Dragon, or any of the associated Characters, and most of the Dragon species can be found in the various books. Natalya is mine, as is most of what you don't recognize from the books or movie.

Summary: See Previous Chapters.

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><p>CHAPTER THREE

No one told Hiccup anything, and probably wouldn't unless he somehow became a Viking.

Hiccup had kept his promise not to speak of Skyfire, but he knew that unless and until the other Vikings saw him as one of them, they wouldn't listen to anything he had to say. The loud boasting that everyone took part in failed miserably when everyone knew that you were the smallest in your age group and could barely lift a weapon, so until that changed, there wasn't much he could do.

Tonight's raid was no different.

A few dragons had landed on Natalya's house hard enough to cause some superficial damage to the roof (she was a kind of babysitter to their young, after all), and Skyfire was busy keeping the rest of them away, but the rest of the village was in chaos, made worse by Hiccup running around with yet another of his inventions, looking for a safe place to set it up.

A loud 'thudâ€|crash' could be heard in the distance, echoing in the heavy silence. Hiccup cringed at the glares aimed at him. "OK, but I hit a Night Fury."

Natalya's ears perked up from where she had been about to sneak off to check on the flock, seeing if any of them had actually taken part in this raid, and if so, making sure that none of them had been badly hurt.

>Hiccup might be in trouble, but he had never made a false claim, unless it was attempting to proclaim his worth as a Viking, even when it would get him out of trouble. He certainly wouldn't claim to have hit something like a Night Fury if he couldn't back it up. Natalya could only thank the Gods that no one believed that as she crept away.<p>

First, check on the flock. Second, start searching for a trapped or injured Night Fury.

* * *

><p>The flock was fine, and the raiding dragons had dropped off some of their catch, which meant that Natalya didn't have to make as many food trips as usual before she snuck back to the village before anyone could notice her missing. She would return to the valley later.</p>

Gobber had barely turned away from the front door of the Chief's Dwelling before Hiccup came stumbling out of the back one. Natalya, on her way back from visiting the Dragon's Valley, tried not to feel amused as she followed him. From the angry, sarcastic and very audible grumblings, he might need to talk to someone who actually believed him about shooting down a dragon, even if she didn't like it. Plus, the Night Fury would need to be sneakily freed before the other Vikings could kill it, and there was a better chance of doing that if she knew where it was.

She was barely in time. Finally tracking her friend down, Natalya turned pale, trying desperately to figure out the best way of interfering, as she saw Hiccup standing over a netted Night Fury, his dagger raised. Her eyes, along with those of the Night Fury, snapped open wide at the sound of someone sawing through ropes. Then she was thinking of a whole new type of intervention when the Night Fury burst free, towering over Hiccup.

For some unknown, but very fortunate reason, the Night Fury did nothing more than pin Hiccup down and roar at him before taking off again. Natalya sat down hard, her heart beating faster than a hummingbird. Hiccup took things a bit further, making it all of a few steps before fainting. Natalya sighed and stood up. There was a stream nearby somewhereâ€¦

* * *

><p>Hiccup woke suddenly when a splash of icy mountain stream-water drenched him. Looking around for the culprit showed itself to be Natalya, one eyebrow raised in question as she held a dripping cup in one hand. Natalya always had some kind of container at hand, though Hiccup had no idea why, but right now he was relieved. "Thanks for that."</p>

Natalya was one of the only people in the village who ever caught the trace of sarcasm that usually infused his voice. She smiled the small, reassuring grin that he relied upon perhaps a bit too much. "You'll dry. So, this Night Fury, where do you think it landed?"

Hiccup cringed and glanced at her, wondering if she was teasing him. He almost hoped that she was, because while he could handle being a disappointment to the rest of Berk, he didn't want to be a disappointment to one of the few people who actually believed that he wasn't useless. Deflection was a long shot, but who knew? "You don't think that I'm crazy or making things up?"

Natalya laughed. "I know you, Hiccup. You would never have said

something that outrageous if you didn't have some way to back it up."

Well, Hiccup knew that she was still taking care of at least one dragon, so perhaps she wanted to find the Night Fury and make sure that it was all right. He didn't know if that was a good thing or a bad thing. "I cut it loose and it got away. It was tied up and at my mercy, and no one would have challenged my claim to be a Viking if I'd brought back proof, but I couldn't do it."

Natalya might ride a dragon, but even she probably wouldn't approve of what he just did. Again, Hiccup only hoped that she wasn't disappointed enough to drop him as a friend. She said nothing either way, and offered a hand to help him up. "Come on, we'll go back to my house while things calm down, and you can sneak back into your place when your father is out."

Natalya shooed a Terrible Terror out of the oven, where it was keeping the stone warm and started mixing ingredients for bread. Few people were in any position to cook their own meals the morning after a dragon raid. "Pass me those mixing bowls, would you, Hiccup? Go make sure the chickens are still there and get the eggs, and I'll cook breakfast once I put the loaves in the oven."

Finding butter in the cool box, and the container of salt and a small sack of flour, a quick bit of math got her started. Flour, salt and water found themselves mixed in a bowl bigger than Hiccup's head, much to the disgruntlement of the Terror who had been looking for a new napping spot after being removed from the oven. "Oh, hush. Light the oven fire and go sleep in the hearth."

Hiccup returned just as she started to knead the dough, nursing a pecked finger as he set the basket down on the counter. "Your hens have it out for me. Anything else you need me to do?"

Natalya shook her head, putting a few eggs aside for breakfast, and the rest for making pies. "You're fine. Now, not that I object, but why didn't you kill the Night Fury?"

Hiccup paused. "I don't know. Maybe because I just felt it was wrong. Maybe because I was a coward. Maybe because he looked as frightened as I was. Maybe because I saw myself in his eyes, as a killer, and I didn't like what I saw."

Hiccup would never believe it if she told him, but that was a good thing, as far as Natalya was concerned. "Will you go looking for him again?"

Hiccup looked away. "I don't know. Probably, if only to study it and see if it has any weaknesses for the next time it raids us." He paused, mind flickering back to something he had noticed but not really registered before. "Hey, was there a Terrible Terror sleeping in your oven?"

Natalya smiled, setting the dough aside to rise and starting to make griddle cakes. "Yes. It keeps the ovens warm, and if the dragons sense the presence of another dragon inside during a raid, they'll leave the house alone. Terrors are cute and easiest to hide, and too intimidated by Skyfire to cause mischief."

Hiccup grinned as she poured the cake mix onto the griddle and disappeared into the stillroom for jam and butter. "It still amazes me how you're so close to them without fear of your life. I don't think anyone else could do it."

Natalya smiled again, giving him a considering look and serving up breakfast. "I think you could, with time and opportunity. You don't give yourself enough credit sometimes, and it's very annoying. I always come out if it wanting to hit whoever put you down, and that isn't a good thing when the person in question is usually the Chief or someone I can't punch without very serious consequences."

Hiccup laughed, which had been Natalya's main aim. "I'd better get home. Dad's already mad, and I don't want to make it worse by not being there when he gets back from doing whatever."

Hiccup left, and Natalya went back to cooking, distinctly more cheerful. The Dragons were safe, Hiccup had started in the right direction as far as dragon tolerance went, and sales were likely to be good once everyone pulled themselves together. She even started humming as she formed the dough into loaves and placed them in the oven.

Her good mood lasted precisely until Baggybum the Beerbelly showed up to inform her that due to most of the village going to search for the Dragon Island/Nest, she was going to go to Dragon Training with the others.

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><p>AN: Right, chapter three is up and I'm really sorry it took so long. I don't want to sound like I'm begging or nagging, but I really do thrive off reviews, and constructive criticism on where I need to improve or what people think should happen really do make me write faster._

Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed it, and I'll do my best not to take so long next time.

Thanks, Nat

4. Chapter 4

Disclaimer: I do not own How To Train Your Dragon, or any of the associated characters. Anything you do not recognize is probably mine.

Summary: See previous chapters

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><p>CHAPTER FOUR

Natalya tried not to fume as she followed the other Vikings into the ring. She had baking to do! How did they expect her to fill all of her orders when the rest of the Tribe returned if her limbs were broken or she was otherwise injured from running around with dragons who didn't know (or didn't care) that they had to be careful when tussling with easily breakable humans, the way her flock did? What would the flock do if she didn't show up?

Most of them had been warned against other Vikings by their parents, but others had known no life outside of the Valley, and trusted Natalya. What if they grew worried and came looking for her, and assumed that all humans were as tolerant as she was?

Well, most of the Vikings were gone searching for the nest. Maybe she could sneak one of the Terrors back to run messages, reassure the flock and to help her cook, rather than waiting for the ovens to heat up. Or if she found a big enough cart, she could take her work to the valley after training, instead.

"I'm hoping for some serious burns."

"I'm hoping for some mauling, like on my lower back."

"Yeah, it's only fun if you get a scar out of it."

Astrid was getting better at sarcasm, and Natalya was hoping for the strength of will to stop her from trying to thump the twins, and was only stopped by the fact that she probably couldn't do so without getting beaten up herself. She jerked out of her planning when she heard Hiccup trudging in, somehow sounding even less enthusiastic than she was. "No kidding. Pain? Love it."

Tuffnut sighed. "Oh, great. Who let him in?"

Gobber spoke over all of them, pretending not to have heard. "Alright, let's get started. The recruit who does best will win the honour of killing his very first dragon."

Natalya mentally cursed, planning to do the worst that she could. Actually, being hopeless enough to be thrown out of Dragon Training sounded like a pretty good ideaâ€¦

Snotlout sneered. "Well, Hiccup already killed a Night Fury, so does that disqualify him?"

Natalya rolled her eyes, clutching her mother's old short-spear and wishing that she had her bow. Unfortunately for Natalya â€“ and luckily for Snotlout â€“ the dragon arena was too small for such a long-ranged weapon to be permitted. "Oh, shut up, Snotlout."

Snotlout ignored her. "Can I transfer to the class with the cool Vikings?"

Gobber ignored him, guiding Hiccup away and speaking him in a low voice as he formed the teens into a line. Glancing upward, Natalya barely managed not to curse when she spotted a single, distinctly-shaped cloud hovering far overhead. Perhaps ranting to

Skyfire last night about not wanting to fight dragons and the probability of serious injury had not been such a good idea. Now it looked like her dragon had decided to hover around to make sure she was safe.

Swiftly turning her attention back to Gobber before anyone could ask what she was staring at, Natalya tried to focus. "Behind these doors are just a few of the many species you will learn to fight. The Deadly Nadder, the Hideous Zippleback, the Monstrous Nightmare, the Terrible Terror and â€“ WILL YOU STOP THAT!"

The yell had been directed at Fishlegs, who had been rattling off Dragon statistics at each name. Fishlegs froze, but whispered to Hiccup as Gobber introduced the Gronkle, his hand on the lever that would open its cage. Snotlout wasn't exactly clever, but even he could guess what was going to happen next. "Wait, aren't you going to train us?"

Gobber ignored, or just didn't notice, the very obvious worry from all of the teens. "I believe in learning on the job."

Natalya swore loudly as the Gronkle burst out of the cage and the trainees scattered as Gobber blithely continued his instruction. "Today is about survival. If you get blasted, you're dead. Quick, what's the first thing ye'll need?"

Hiccup was clearly re-thinking his dream of fighting dragons. "A doctor?"

Fishlegs looked faintly hysterical. "Plus-five speed?"

Natalya dodged Snotlout, trying to find the fastest way to the exit, which was promptly blocked by Gobber. "A quick escape route?"

Astrid, as usual, had the right answer: "A shield!"

Natalya glared at her cousin, grabbing the nearest shield and throwing herself behind the weapons rack, taking cover until she had a better idea of what was going on. Hiccup was struggling to pick up a shield while holding onto his axe, while Astrid had grabbed a shield and was standing in a ready position. Someone needed to take the twins aside and tell them that when you are in immediate danger of being roasted by a dragon, it is not the time to fight over which twin gets which shield, especially since the shield was hit by a blast from the Gronkle, spinning both twins around and causing Gobber to call them out.

The remaining four were back in a more or less steady line as Gobber retrieved Natalya from her hiding place. "Those shields are good for another thing: noise. Make lots of it; it'll throw off a dragon's aim. Now, all dragons have a limited number of shots; how many does a Gronkle have?"

Hiccup had taken Natalya's place as soon as Gobber's back was turned, but Snotlout was still running as he shouted a guess, "Five?"

Fishlegs made the mistake of standing still to correct him. "No, no: six!"

Fishlegs was so pleased at knowing the right answer that he failed to notice the Gronkle coming up behind him until it blasted his shield to bits, causing Natalya to narrow her eyes in thought. So far, the Gronkle had only made two shots, despite ample opportunity, and Natalya had seen dragons fighting enough times to realize that the Gronkle was aiming for the shields, rather than the trainees themselves.

Lowering her shield down and to the side, just enough to show a lack of hostility, she beat a quick tattoo on the edge, drawing the dragon's attention while Gobber was focussing on the others. The Gronkle didn't try to blast her, but flew forward in a maneuver that Natalya recognized from over-excited Terrible Terrors zooming in to greet her. Deliberately, she fell backwards to lessen the impact, the Gronkle nuzzling her for a few seconds before Snotlout actually tackled it, knocking the dragon away before he retreated back to Astrid. "Hey, did you see me? How cool a move was that?"

Smiling in relief and at Astrid's expression, Natalya retreated to where Fishlegs and the Twins were sitting, content to sit back and observe.

Snotlout was still trying and failing miserably to flirt with Astrid, and like Fishlegs, was so intent that he failed to notice the dragon until it was too late. Astrid rolled over to where Hiccup had been dragged out of hiding, and then darted away again as the Gronkle's next shot landed between them, and Natalya spotted a problem.

Hiccup did not have his father's size or build, but there were several unmistakable similarities, and the dragons had no love for Stoik the Vast. Astrid looked indignant when the Gronkle ignored her, despite clearly being the greater threat, and went after Hiccup, who did the sensible thing and bolted.

Natalya's best and only friend wasn't fast enough, though, and she scrambled to her feet again as the Gronkle backed Hiccup up against a wall, opening its mouth in preparation to flame the youth. Natalya darted forward, not even knowing what she could do, but Gobber got there first, yanking the Gronkle's jaw so that the fire missed Hiccup by inches.

Natalya collapsed in relief as Gobber dragged the Gronkle back, before Astrid dragged her back upright, hissing about being a 'family embarrassment'. Natalya returned a silent glare as Gobber closed the Gronkle's cage. "Remember, a dragon will always, ALWAYS, go for the kill."

* * *

><p>Hiccup caught Natalya's eye as the trainees left the arena, walking in silence until they were far enough away from the village for Skyfire to join them. Hiccup felt a strange surge of almost longing as he watched his friend lean against the blue scales, eyes closed and smiling softly.</p>

No-one had great expectations of Natalya, or commented about how sad a day it would be when she took over the tribe. If she felt lonely, she could just take to the skies on a dragon who clearly adored her.

Maybe one day she could even just fly away and not return, and Hiccup would lay good money on her doing just that if anyone tried to make her actually kill a dragon.

Then what would he do?

He shook himself out of it. "Hey, Natalya?"

She looked up from where she had been crooning to the huge beast, as though it were a pet. Sure, Hiccup had known for a while that Natalya could fly a dragon, but he had never considered that they might share an actual bond. Hiccup tried to regain his train of thought. "Gobber said that dragons will always go for the kill," he ignored the raised eyebrow and pointed look at Skyfire, "I know, I know, but the Night Fury obviously saw me as an enemy, so why didn't it roar?"

Natalya shrugged. "I have no idea." She placed one foot on the bent knee of Skyfire's left foreleg, swinging herself up onto the dragon's back. "I need to go hunting, do you want to come?"

After nearly being killed by the Gronkle only half an hour ago, Hiccup did not. He knew better than to actually say as such, though, and shook his head. "No, I think I'll go for a walk around, but I'll meet you back at your place before we have to meet Gobber for dinner.

Natalya nodded and patted her dragon on the neck, the backlash from Skyfire's wings nearly knocking Hiccup over. He walked past where his broken bolas lay on the ground, following in the direction that the Night Fury had disappeared.

* * *

><p>Skyfire had brought down an elk, and lay in Natalya's backyard to eat her half, having cut the rest into pieces small enough for Natalya to manage as the young woman settled down to do her baking. She had taken to using a slow-rising dough, so that she could make it in the evening or morning, and have it double or triple in size when she woke or came back from Dragon Training. Then all she had to do was shape it into whatever she was cooking and put it in the oven.</p>

Natalya had just finished placing the first loaves into the oven, a few Terrible Terrors shredding the meat off the bones, when Hiccup burst in, waving his notebook and so excited that he tripped over a stool. Natalya helped him up with the involuntary affectionate smile that always came out when Hiccup was around. "Careful."

Hiccup waved it off. "Never mind that! You'll never believe what I found!" He waved the notebook; open to a page with a drawing of a dragon that Natalya had never seen before. "I found the Night Fury!"

Half-way through flattening a ball of dough to make a stuffed bun, something her father had sworn by as a good on-the-go food, Natalya's hands stilled.

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><p>AN: Yes, I know, it has been way too long since I updated this. 'Riders of Berk' gave me some of my inspiration back, so hopefully it won't be too long before the next chapter. You can thank CahillDragonRiderDemigodWitch for prompting me not to forget this fic. *waves*

Thanks,

Nat

5. IMPORTANT NOTE! PLEASE READ!

Not a new chapter, but one is on the way, thanks to a small amount of writing time over the holidays.

I was going over what I had already written and realised that not only was it turning out far too close to another HTTYD story of mine, it was going to wind up basically a "rehash plus 1" story.

With that in mind, I am currently re-writing the chapters to be a bit more consistent and in line with the continuity.

So the question is, should I rewrite it as a separate story, or just change the earlier chapters?

EDIT: The First Chapter of the re-written version is up as a separate story, and will be VERY different to the original version.

End
file.